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ABSTRACT

Questionnaire responses from 187 speech instructors representing 96 junior colleges in the western United States were studied to determine approaches to the basic speech course at these institutions. Such a course is required for graduation at 42 per cent of the institutions: it typically receives three semester units of credit, meets 54 hours per term, and emphasizes public speaking. Development of a general facility in basic speech techniques appears to be the fundamental course objective. Types of speech receiving the greatest emphasis are those to inform, to persuade, and to demonstrate; however, impromptu speaking and discussions are also frequently mentioned. Course requirements usually encompass seven to eight major speeches, a few quizzes, reports on speeches and lectures, and out-of-class written assignments. Most instructors prefer an informal rather than a standardized grading form, and 93 per cent report no use of the "normal curve" in grade assignment. About 60 per cent of class time is used for speech presentation, and about 20 per cent for criticism. Most instructors report current use of voice recordings for student skill development, with many indicating future plans to use videotape. Based on these and other findings of the report, it is concluded that, while similarities and diversities in approach are apparent, follow-up study is needed to spot trends, new developments, and successful innovative techniques. (JO)

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Methods and Trends in the Junior College Basic Speech Course

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Rationale

The dramatic growth of the junior college in recent years, both in number and significance, gives rise to an increasing need for investigation of pedagogical approaches to basic course offerings in these institutions. The studies which have been made at this level have not reached a wide audience since few junior colleges take advantage of the machinery for sharing information regarding current practices, trends and methodologies. A study in depth of the basic speech course is of particular significance inasmuch as the first course is selected by the vast majority of students and represents, in most cases, their only exposure to formal speech training. Such an investigation, then, can have important implications at curriculum and department level for these growing schools.

This study was initiated primarily as an exploratory survey to determine pedagogical approaches to the basic speech course in the junior colleges in the Western Speech Association area. Percentages and averages did produce a composite pattern of the typical offering; however, this is not intended to represent the ideal. It is,however, illustrative of what is occuring in the beginning course in the junior colleges.

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Survey

In October, 1966, under the auspices of the Western Speech Association, questionnaires were sent to the offices of the presidents of all junior colleges in the fourteen Western states as listed in the American Junior College Association Directory. Over ninety percent of the questionnaires were returned with the listings of all instructors involved in the teaching of the basic speech course in these institutions. From these returns, a composite list of four hundred and fifty-eight instructors currently teaching speech in the Western states junior colleges was compiled.

In April, 1967, a questionnaire was sent to each of these instructors. The form consisted of questions concerning class size, number, and types of speaking and written assignments, the evaluation and grading of speeches, the use of special facilities, innovative attempts and general trends, practices and techniques. Several respondents objected to the closed form of questioning in that a yes or no choice offered no latitude for explication. The instructors, however, were encouraged to respond at some length if they so desired and were asked to include syllabi, evaluation forms and assignment sheets.

One hundred and ninety-seven questionnaires were answered and returned. Of these, one hundred and eighty-seven were usable, representing a forty percent sampling. A number of instructors indicated that they were answering for the entire speech staff and that their reply represented the methods and trends consistent with pedagogical approaches of the speech department. Ninety-six responses were received from the one hundred and twenty-five institutions polled. Seventy-six percent of the schools, then, were represented in the survey.

Structure of the Basic Course

The introductory course is required for graduation in 42 percent of the institutions, and 90 percent offer three semester units for the class. The class size ranges from ten to thirty or more, with an average of twenty-three students. Fifty percent of the sections are met 51 to 60 hours per term with 28 percent meeting 41 to 50 hours. In 49 percent of the replies there are five to seven speaking assignments normally given during the course work, and eight to ten given in 38 percent. Syllabi or other guidelines apparently play a large role in offering direction in the course. Sixty-eight percent of the instructors use such outlines, but three-fourths responded that there is much latitude in following them.

Six speech types which normally would constitute class assignments in the beginning course were listed and instructors were asked to indicate which were offered and the time limits for each. These findings are summarized in Table #1.

Speaking Assignments

Table 1
Types and Duration of Speaking Assignments

Speech	Required	Time Limits (Minutes) 3-4	5-6	7-8	9-10	11 or more
Introduction	64%	76%	14%	6%	4%	
To demonstrate	78%	29%	52%	11%	7%	1%
To inform	97%	20%	56%	14%	8%	2%
To entertain	37%	30%	47%	16%	6%	1%
To persuade	94%	10%	30%	32%	22%	6%
To arouse	59%	16%	37%	23%	20%	4%

It seems clear from Table #1 that the speeches to inform, to persuade and to demonstrate are still considered the most important assignments. The speech to convince or persuade, because of the frequency of offering and the relatively longer time limits, would appear to be the one type considered most important. The speech to entertain, long accepted as one of the three of four major types, is offered less frequently. Perhaps the reason why 63 percent of the instructors did not require the speech is linked to the observation,

"My students do best at straight expository, informative communication. They lack the background for advocacy and the wit of humor. And they need expository skills (speaking, writing, reading, listening) in their other classes."

A casual inspection of recent speech texts indicates also that the speech to entertain has been given much less space than in previous books; in many cases it is not covered at all.

Nine additional speech activities were also listed and instructors checked those offered in the basic course. Impromptu speaking was included in 73 percent of the responses, discussion (59 percent), interpretive reading (39 percent), panels (37 percent), oral reports (22 percent), sales talks (18 percent), and parliamentary procedure (8 percent). Eighty percent of the instructors also require a final speech.

Out-of-class written assignments are required by 70 percent of those responding. Listening reports of lectures and speeches was the most common listing. Three to four tests or quizzes are given during the term in 40 percent of the cases, while 37 percent give one or two. Only 4 percent give seven or more tests.

The use of outlines and note cards varies a great deal. Forty-seven percent of the respondents require outlines on all speeches, 38 percent on most speeches and 15 percent on some speeches. The majority of instructors placed some constraint on the use of notes. In general, 31 percent permit complete freedom in the use of speaking notes, 66 percent permit limited use, while 15 percent do not allow the use of notes at all.

Credit for speaking assignments is given by letter grade by 62 percent of the instructors and numerical points by 35 percent; the others somehow use a combination of the two methods. Ninety-three percent make no attempt at using a normal curve in assigning grades. A number of instructors noted that a normal curve would be impossible to establish; others asked "what is a normal curve"?

Evaluation of speeches

The questions regarding evaluation brought a wide variety of responses. Fifty instructors returned evaluation forms with the questionnaire, but there was only one case of two instructors using the same form. The forms varied in complexity from a five item check list to one with more than forty categories. Sixty percent of the instructors indicated that they did not use a standardized evaluation form. Several instructors noted that they started with a blank piece of paper, since a check list was too restrictive. Fifty-eight percent offer oral critiques after each speaker, while 34 percent give evaluations after each group of speakers. Perhaps

class size places some burden on the time which can be alloted for critique. Audience criticism and discussion is always encouraged by 56 percent of the respondents, and another 36 percent favor audience participation to some extent.

Facilities

Voice recording on tape is the most frequently used method (74 percent) for developing speech skills. Twenty-three percent use voice drills, 19 percent are presently making use of video tape recordings, 17 percent use closed circuit T.V., and 16 percent employ rehearsal rooms. Many instructors indicated that their department would be using video tape recordings in a year or two. Judging from the number of replies pointing up this direction in many schools, video tape recording might very well be one of the most striking innovations in speech training in the near future. Several instructors also noted that all the facilities listed on the questionnaire would be available to speech students when the department moved to the new "speech wing" or "speech building."

Summary

The typical speech course, then, emerges as one which emphasizes public speaking. The course offers three semester units of work and is normally met fifty-four hours per term.

Students are required to give seven or eight major speeches during the course, with the speeches to inform, to persuade and to demonstrate the most common types presented.

Impromptu speaking and various types of discussion are the most frequent additional offerings in the beginning course. Two-thirds of the instructors require written assignments, usually a listening critique, and three tests or quizzes are normally given during the term. There is an individualized approach

to evaluation. Many of the instructors preferred the more personalized general comments in the less restrictive areas of "strong points" and "needs improvement." Judging from available data, approximately 60 percent of class time is devoted to performance and nearly 20 percent to speech criticism.

Although a variety of pedagogical approaches is in evidence, the primary aim of the junior college first course is to develop a general facility in the basic techniques of speech preparation and delivery. Listening improvement, critical thought, research and organizational skills and allied goals are all by-products of this overall design of most offerings. Any specific aims seem to fall between making the course academically respectable for the transfer student and immediately functional for the terminal. And while these goals seem to be at opposite poles, they are not incompatible; in all probability they are convergent.

As stated previously, the research was undertaken to explore trends in speech pedagogism in the junior college basic course. Although there was no written or implied intent of any effort at standardization as a result of the investigation, the most frequent addendum to the questionnaire was a defense of individual approaches to the teaching of speech.

A typical first course did emerge, but with it came a wide variety of approaches to attain a number of differing goals. Perhaps one unfortunate aspect of these conclusions is that there is little previous comparative data with which to contrast earlier pedagogical approaches with what might be innovative techniques employed today.

Many questions have not been answered satisfactorily. Obviously, further investigation of a variety of queries posed by respondents is needed to determine the role of the basic speech course in the junior college. How do we evaluate undergraduate thinking? What are typical standards for evaluation? How much does one instructor differ from another, one school from another?

Can the standards be the same as for senior institutions? Which speech purposes are to be served? How does class size determine speech effectiveness? What can we offer the terminal student? A follow-up study is needed,certainly, to examine innovative methods employed in developing adequate speech facility in those thousands of students whose only exposure to formal speech training is the junior college basic course. Hopefully, this study will offer a base line for additional investigations of speech pedagogism in the junior college.